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ARTICLE

Swaraj (*circa* 1885–1922): Gandhi and the early history of an untranslatable signifier

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Abstract

'Swaraj' is perhaps the most widely known of the keywords that are associated with Indian nationalism. Although it was initially used to translate the Western concept of 'self-government', by the second decade of the twentieth century, *swaraj* had become a complex term that could not be readily translated by using English expressions. Intellectual historians have extensively analysed the use of swaraj in the Gandhian oeuvre. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* has often been taken as a guide to explain the meaning of the term. However, the prior history of swaraj and the uses of swaraj by politicians who disagreed with Gandhi's definition of that term have not been adequately explored. To fill this lacuna, in this article, a selection of instances are examined that marked the transformation of swaraj from a traditional term that was associated with the precolonial Maratha history to an untranslatable term that was used by Indian nationalists to conceptualise their anti-colonial activism. I demonstrate here that swaraj was left untranslated in a range of English-language Indian political texts and documents to shape an agenda that was opposed to the collaborationist policies of imperial liberalism. The article thus illustrates the crucial role that the question of untranslatability played in sustaining the anti-colonial agenda of mainstream Indian nationalism.

Keywords: intellectual history; nationalism; self-government; untranslatability

In December 1907, Gandhi decided to crowdsource the task of translating some English terms into Gujarati. In the journal *Indian Opinion*, Gandhi donned his activist-journalist's cap and asked the readers to offer Indian equivalents for the following four expressions: passive resistance; passive resister; cartoon; civil disobedience. He promised his readers a prize in return but also hoped that they would take on the translational task 'out of patriotism'.[1] The responses that Gandhi subsequently received mostly disappointed him[2] but one reader's suggestion—that *sadāgraha* should be used as an equivalent for passive resistance—struck a chord.[3] Gandhi minimally altered the suggested word and replaced '*sad*' with '*satya*':

[1] See Gandhi, *Collected Works*, 98 vols (Ahmedabad and Delhi, 1958–1994), vol. vii, p. 455.

[2] Gandhi considered 'almost all' of the suggested equivalents as 'useless'. One reader suggested that Civil Disobedience should be translated as *satyānādara*—a term that did not please Gandhi, as it meant 'disobedience to truth'; see Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. viii, p. 130. In *Indian Opinion*, the expression *ramujī citra* was used a few times to substitute for cartoon; see e.g. Gandhi, *Akshardeha*, 82 vols. (Ahmedabad, 1967–2012), vol. viii, p. 391.

[3] Maganlal Gandhi—a member of the extended Gandhi family—suggested this equivalent; see A. Skaria, *Unconditional Equality: Gandhi's Religion of Resistance* (Minneapolis, 2016), p. 2.

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> I think satyagraha is better than sadagraha. 'Resistance' means determined opposition to anything. The correspondent has rendered it as agraha. Agraha in a right cause is sat or satya agraha. The correspondent therefore has rendered 'passive resistance' as firmness in a good cause. Though the phrase does not exhaust the connotation of the word 'passive', we shall use satyagraha till a word is available which deserves the prize.[4]

Thus was born *satyāgraha*: a Gandhian neologism that soon became the most celebrated word in the Indian nationalist lexicon and was eventually internationalised by its use beyond the South Asian political milieux. Despite being used initially as an equivalent for passive resistance, satyagraha was transformed through many distinguished uses by Gandhi and his followers into a concept that could not be translated by using a set of English phrases. This novel status of satyagraha was recognised, for instance, by Martin Luther King Jr, who considered the Gandhian concept as 'profoundly significant' but distanced himself from 'passive resistance', as he thought that some may consider that as 'a sort of "do-nothing method" in which the resister quietly and passively accepts evil'.[5]

The birth of satyagraha—a pivotal event in the history of Indians in South Africa—points to one of Gandhi's early efforts to Indianise political terms of Western provenance that became greatly successful. Some of the Indian political concepts that are now closely associated with Gandhi, however, were not originally or exclusively authored by him. *Swarāj/Swarājya* is one such term. Many scholars have discussed how Gandhi appropriated swaraj for his political theorisation in his treatise *Hind Swaraj* and popularised it in a way that no other figure among the Indian nationalists had done. But, unlike Gandhi's own satyagraha, the political uses of the signifier swaraj predated Gandhi's rise as a political thinker; repeated early uses of swaraj as a modern political concept can be traced back to the 1880s to 1890s. Both satyagraha and swaraj, nonetheless, have one feature in common: it can be argued that both of these terms belong to the category of untranslatable words—that is, words that are 'left untranslated' as they are 'transferred from language to language'.[6] However, unlike satyagraha, which has been exhaustively analysed by scholars, the transformation of the signifier swaraj—over the many decades of the evolution of Indian nationalism—remains to be fully investigated. This article steps in to remedy the current lacuna and investigates the evolution of the signifier swaraj; it demonstrates the gradual emergence of swaraj as an untranslatable signifier in early twentieth-century India.

At the outset, the recourse in this article to the notion of untranslatability makes it necessary to briefly consider the recent scholarship which concerns that concept—and hence a short detour is in order. The theme of untranslatability has recently attracted much scholarly attention in the wake of the publication of a French dictionary of untranslatable terms that was edited by Barbara Cassin.[7] The appearance of an English edition of Cassin's dictionary (with additional entries) has further encouraged new investigations into the limits of translation.[8] Emily Apter, one of the editors of the translated edition of the French dictionary, also examined 'untranslatables' extensively in a monograph and used untranslatability as an argument against the recent trend for academic legitimisation and promotion of World Literature.[9] Subsequent to these publications—in light of

[4] Suggestions that Gandhi rejected: *pratyupāya*; *kaṣṭādhīna prativartana*; *driḍha pratipakṣa*; see Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. viii, p. 131.

[5] M. L. King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (Boston, 1958), pp. 84–90.

[6] See the 'Preface' in B. Cassin (ed.), *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, English eds. E. Apter, J. Lezra, and M. Wood (Princeton, 2014), p. vii.

[7] B. Cassin (ed.), *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (Paris, 2006).

[8] Cassin, *Dictionary of Untranslatables*.

[9] E. Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London, 2013).

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the conversations that have taken place in the anglophone academia—it is possible to conclude that a consensus has yet to emerge on the question of untranslatability.[10] Regardless of such disagreements and criticisms that Cassin and Apter have faced from fellow academics, it appears that these scholars have managed to set the question of untranslatability free from the usual scholarly confines: the discourse of professional translators and translation theorists. Their lexicological approach to the study of untranslatability has thrown into relief the social and political processes through which untranslatable signifiers are engendered. By drawing on Cassin and Apter's influential theorisation, it can be claimed that untranslatability does not always result from the incommensurability of languages. Extra-linguistic politics of exclusion or a variety of translational interdictions extant in a society, too, can contribute to the making of 'untranslatables'.[11] It is also crucial to note that scholars such as Cassin and Apter have not sought to produce in their discourse a binary opposition between words that are amenable to translation and those that resist translation. Their description of 'untranslatables' as expressions that are repeatedly subjected to retranslation, non-translation, and mistranslation[12] resonates well with Naoki Sakai's statement that 'untranslatablity does not exist before translation: translation is the a priori of the untranslatable'.[13]

Informed by the above insights, this article recounts the transformation of swaraj by attending to the complex itinerary of that signifier through the late colonial period in India—primarily from the time of the inception of the Indian nationalist movement in the 1880s to the era of its consolidation under Gandhi's leadership in the early 1920s. The intention here is to demonstrate that, in the early years of nationalism, swaraj had been used as an equivalent for the English expression 'self-government' but, within a few decades, this much-valorised nationalist signifier had become a translation-resistant expression. What follows is hence an investigation of the sequence of events that variously threatened the initially established equivalence of 'self-government' and swaraj—and later undermined the same.

Toward a genealogical investigation

Scholars of Indian nationalism have commented in detail on Gandhi's use and exegesis of swaraj in his treatise *Hind Swaraj*. Originally published in Gujarati as *Hind Swarajya*, Gandhi's celebrated work transformed the meaning of swaraj or self-rule. In his treatise,

[10] David Bellos—a professor of French literature and author of many translations—has commented in a review of Apter's work that the 'only expressions that are truly untranslatable are those you do not understand well enough (or at all)' and that 'the problem with them is their inscrutability, not their untranslatability'; see D. Bellos, '*Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* by Emily Apter (review)', *Common Knowledge* 21.1 (2015), p. 110. Even more critical has been the response of Lawrence Venuti, the acclaimed theorist of translation. In Venuti's opinion, the notion of untranslatability is a product of both 'political naïveté' and 'instrumental thinking about translation' that effectively reinforces 'the current critical orthodoxy in academic literary and cultural studies'; see L. Venuti, *Contra instrumentalism: A Translation Polemic* (Lincoln, 2019), pp. 79–81.

[11] Apter's discussion of the Palestinian artist Emily Jacir's installation 'TRANSLATE ALLAH' helpfully draws attention to this fact. By leaving the word 'Allah' untranslated and associating it exclusively with Islam, the American media sought to 'isolate' Muslims in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Jacir's billboard was a response to this prevailing trend and was displayed in New York in 2003. The installation thus underscored the translatability of 'Allah' and its political significance at a crucial moment in recent history when Muslims were being treated variously as a suspect community in the West. Such instances of untranslatability as mentioned by Apter indicate that, at times, extra-linguistic barriers that are placed between languages make translations very hard to accomplish; see Apter, *Against World Literature*, p. 99.

[12] See E. Apter, 'Afterword: towards a theory of reparative translation', in *The Work of World Literature*, (eds.) F. Guisti and B. L. Robinson (Berlin, 2021), p. 212.

[13] N. Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On 'Japan' and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis, 1997), p. 5.

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Gandhi claimed that the British departure from India, by default, could not have ensured true swaraj and he evocatively reminded his readers that some Indians might have wanted to replace the British only in order to establish 'English rule without the Englishman'.[14] In contrast, Gandhi argued that the nationalists must distance themselves from the civilisation that the colonial state represented.[15] There was a realisation that Indian self-government hence required, according to Gandhi, a break in the mimetic bond that joined Western civilisation and the Indian subjects of the British empire. Gandhi also argued that recognition of the moral superiority of the Indian civilisation would enable such a disjuncture and serve as the foundation for a true swaraj.[16]

Although Gandhi's treatise has been feted as being a document that achieved a break with the prior nationalist past, in some respects, it is possible to doubt its claim to originality. The formation of the nationalist discourse in colonial India is a much-studied topic and scholarly investigations have laid bare the common themes and trends that connect Gandhi with the interlocutors of nationalism who came before him.[17] However, the connection of Gandhi's ideas to a prior history of political discourses can also be accomplished by charting genealogies of the concepts that were widely used by Indian nationalists in their documented communications. Hence, I suggest that a conceptual history of swaraj might better explain the ways in which Gandhi moulded this pre-existing concept and allow us to mark a departure from predominantly internalist readings of swaraj that focus primarily or exclusively on works that were authored by Gandhi. Though such internalist readings have several merits, they might discourage us from venturing beyond the ready-made enclosures of individual oeuvres and prevent us from discovering actual historical trajectories of political concepts.

Let me further explain this point by referring to a recent essay by Tridip Suhrud that is deserving of our attention. As one of those rare scholars who pay attention to the bilingualism that is present in much of Gandhi's oeuvre and especially in *Hind Swaraj*—a text that was first written in Gujarati but translated without much delay into English by Gandhi himself—Suhrud reminds us that crucial features of Gandhi's famous political treatise will surely be missed if only the English version of *Hind Swaraj* is read and analysed:

> Let us first consider the curious case of the title itself. Gandhi's handwritten manuscript […] used the term *Rajya*; it is *Hind Swarajya* and not *Hind Swaraj*. […] But during the English translation done soon after and published on March 20, 1910, the term *Rajya* was substituted by *Raj*, and this usage was standardised in subsequent Gujarati editions, beginning with the 1914 edition.[18]

Suhrud finds this act of substitution especially significant. He explains it in terms of Gandhi's intention to think about the nation outside the restricted conceptual enclosure of the territorial imagination of home rule as expressed in English-language political discourses. Instead of the idea of home rule, the quest to attain 'rule over oneself' became 'basic to Gandhi's idea of Swaraj'.[19] Although I do not intend to summarily reject these

[14] M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, (ed.) A. J. Parel (Cambridge, 1997), p. 28.
[15] *Ibid*, p. 33.
[16] *Ibid*, p. 114.
[17] See e.g. P. Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London, 1986).
[18] See T. Suhrud, 'Reading Hind Swarajya/Swaraj in two languages', in *Politics, Ethics and the Self: Re-Reading Gandhi's Hind Swaraj*, (ed.) R. Bhargava (London, 2022), p. 337.
[19] *Ibid*, p. 338.

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insightful suggestions, I do harbour doubts about Suhrud's largely internalist analysis of the semantic shifts that are found in *Hind Swaraj*. Such internalist readings, I submit, make Gandhi's use of certain Indian terms appear excessively *sui generis*.

Let us consider, for instance, the original title of Gandhi's famous 1909 treatise. The significance of the title *Hind Swarajya* might escape us if we engage exclusively in exegetical discussions of Gandhi's text. *Hind Swarajya* was not a wholly new title in early twentieth-century India—and it was in no way purely a product of Gandhi's political–theoretical genius. Long before Gandhi's treatise appeared, there was already in existence a nationalist periodical called *Hind Swarajya*. Anglo-Marathi and Anglo-Gujarati editions of this periodical were in circulation in Bombay Presidency as far back as 1906.[20] *Hind Swarajya*—also mentioned with the subtitle 'Indian Home Ruler'[21] in contemporary news reports—was a periodical that was prominent enough for Valentin Chirol to have commented in 1910 that it 'achieved a circulation hitherto unknown to the Indian Press'.[22] Chirol cited, in his *Indian Unrest*, a few 'specimens' of 'hatred' from *Hind Swarajya* that, according to him, 'animated' the champions of swaraj:

> Why are you afraid of Englishmen. They are not gods, but men like yourselves, or, rather, monsters who have ravished your Sita-like beauty. If there be any Rama amongst you, let him go forth to bring back your Sita. Raise the banner of Swadesh, crying Victory to the Mother! Rescue the truth and accomplish the good of India.[23]

Given this incendiary rhetoric, it was hardly surprising that, in 1908, Tribhovandas Purshottamdas Mangrolevalla, the editor, printer, and proprietor of *Hind Swarajya*, was booked under sections 124A and 153A of the Indian Penal Code for publishing Gujarati articles that were critical of the colonial government.[24] The phrase 'Hind Swarajya' was hence not only already in circulation, but it is also plausible that Mangrolevalla's publication was well known in the nationalist circles of Bombay Presidency. When this context is taken into consideration, Gandhi's decision to name his Gujarati treatise *Hind Swarajya* appears to have been an act of active defiance—an openly confrontational gesture vis-à-vis the colonial state.

The title *Hind Swaraj*, which was used later to rename the Gujarati treatise *Hind Swarajya*, was also already in circulation prior to the publication of Gandhi's text. In 1908, during the famous trial of Tilak, references were made to the '*Hind Swarajya* case' or the trial of the editor-cum-proprietor of *Hind Swarajya*. In the discussions that ensued—the documented court proceedings tell us—*Hind Swaraj* was used interchangeably with *Hind Swarajya*.[25] Hence, it is possible to argue that, when it came to colloquial communications, it was not unusual—at around the time at which Gandhi's famous treatise was written—to substitute swaraj in place of swarajya. It is also likely that swarajya was used more commonly in the nineteenth century and its shortened form, swaraj, came to be widely adopted in the twentieth century; however, it should also be noted that, in twentieth-century nationalist documents, these terms were transposed, used interchangeably, and

[20] Government of Bombay, *Report on Native Papers Published in the Bombay Presidency for the Week Ending 16th June 1906* (Bombay, 1906), p. 9.

[21] See e.g. '"Hind Swarajya" case', *The Times of India*, 12 June 1908, p. 4.

[22] V. Chirol, *Indian Unrest* (London, 1910), p. 22.

[23] *Ibid*, p. 16.

[24] *The Indian High Court Reports* (Calcutta, 1926), p. 49.

[25] N. C. Kelkar, *Full and Authentic Report of the Tilak Trial: The Only Authorised Verbatim Account of the Whole Proceedings with Introduction and Character Sketch of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, together with Press Opinion* (Bombay, 1908), pp. 92–98.

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treated as identical synonyms.[26] There are many such instances and these allow us, in this article, to treat swaraj/swarajya as the same signifier, spelt in two distinct ways.

Admittedly, I am not alone in suggesting that internalist readings of Gandhi might be inadequate for the purpose of grasping the significance of the concepts that he popularised. Other scholars who have sought to explore the significance of Gandhi's contribution to political thought have argued likewise. In an article that discussed the '*fin de siecle* location' of *Hind Swaraj*, Dilip M. Menon persuasively argued that special attention must be paid to 'the diverse and now-forgotten fields of discourse' within which Gandhi's views originated.[27] By connecting Gandhi's text to other authors and commentators that pertain to the same milieu, Menon observed that, in *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi 'is intent on glorifying India in much the same manner that the Hindu right wing would in later years' and that he 'ventriloquises the civilisational credo' that is upheld by his Hindu nationalist opponent, namely V. D. Savarkar.[28] More recently, Eijiro Hazama has remarked that, after his return to India from South Africa, Gandhi had to place his cosmopolitan political ideas within a Hindu nationalist framework. This was done by Gandhi in recognition of 'the surging air of Hindu nationalism' and 'to secure moral–financial support from primarily well-to-do vānīyās'.[29] Such views seek to reassess Gandhian contributions from a perspective that steps out of the bounds of what Faisal Devji once called 'the sanctimonious and nationalistic historiography'[30]; they also remind us of 'the positions within and against which'[31] Gandhi presented his political views.

By taking inspiration from scholars who go past 'the tired verities'[32] of nationalist historiography, in this article, I intend to sketch a preliminary history of the emergence of swaraj as an untranslatable term of Indian origin that entered—in the early twentieth century—the English lexicon of the Indian nationalists. I discuss below two parallel but contradictory processes, or sequences of events, that made swaraj a historically overdetermined term that could not be readily translated into English. The first of these two historical processes involved prominent Indians among the nationalists who promoted co-operation with the colonial rulers in order to secure political reforms. These collaborationists used the term swaraj to set a political goal for their Indian compatriots. The second process featured the colonial administrators in India who sought to criminalise the expression of political dissent by branding certain words as seditious. In the documents that were produced by the colonial state, swaraj hence came to be associated with conspiracies that supposedly threatened the very existence of British rule in India. In this way—by focusing attention on the early history of the signifier swaraj—we should be able to better gauge the extent to which Gandhi's intervention changed that signifier and secured a permanent place for it in the Indian political vocabulary. However, at the very outset, it is worthwhile to briefly examine some pre-nationalist uses of the word 'swarajya'.

Swaraj before nationalism

The early colonial past of the expression *Swarajya* is shrouded in obscurity; we have yet to learn when, and by whom, swarajya was first suggested as a vernacular synonym for the

[26] See e.g. *Report of the Thirty-Seventh Indian National Congress* (Patna, 1923), *passim*.

[27] D. M. Menon, 'An eminent Victorian: Gandhi, Hind Swaraj and the crisis of liberal democracy in the nineteenth century', *History of the Present: A Journal of Critical History* 7.1 (2017), p. 33.

[28] *Ibid*, p. 48.

[29] E. Hazama, 'Unravelling the myth of Gandhian non-violence: why did Gandhi connect his principle of Satyāgraha with the "Hindu" notion of Ahiṃsā?', *Modern Intellectual History* 20 (2023), p. 118.

[30] F. Devji, 'The undertaker', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 32.1 (2018), p. 104.

[31] Menon, 'Eminent Victorian', p. 33.

[32] Devji, 'The undertaker', p. 105.

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expression 'self-government'. It is possible, nonetheless, to trace the history of modern invocations of swarajya as far back as the mid-nineteenth century. A Marathi news report—published in the periodical *Dnyanodaya* on 15 May 1852—offers us an early example of the use of swarajya as a modern term.[33] The report in question discussed British Prime Minister Edward Stanley's proposal to appoint a committee to inquire into the renewal of the East India Company's charter.[34] It also summarised the prime minister's speech—delivered in the British parliament in support of the proposal—in which the colonial domination of India was justified by means of statements such as 'the people of India do not have adequate knowledge (*barobara jñāna*) to conduct swarajya'.[35] In this otherwise ordinary reportage, the singular yet decidedly modern use of the expression *Swarajya*—as a translational equivalent of self-government—stands out. This arresting feature of the report also reminds us of a crucial fact: whereas swaraj as a nationalist signifier is a much-discussed theme, the early colonial beginnings of that signifier—the documents that offer us the earliest instances of its use as a vernacular synonym for self-government—have yet to be adequately researched and explained.

Although the pre-nationalist/early colonial career of the expression *Swarajya* has not attracted enough critical scrutiny, scholars have often noted the existence of that expression in precolonial documents. For the sake of brevity, I discuss here two examples that underscore the markedly different ways in which swarajya, as a precolonial idea, has been understood and portrayed. The first is taken from the book *Hindu-Pad-Padashahi*, which was published by V. D. Savarkar in 1925 with the avowed aim to 'place before the non-Maratha scholars and readers' a new history of Maharashtra.[36] In Savarkar's book, a special emphasis was laid on the idea of 'Hindavi Swarajya'—perhaps as a counterpoint to the Gandhian advocacy of Hindu–Muslim unity in texts such as *Hind Swaraj*:

> This word 'Hindavi Swaraj,' coming from the pen of Shivaji himself, reveals, as nothing else could have done, the very soul of the great movement that stirred the life and activities of Maharashtra for a hundred years and more. Even in its inception the Maratha rising was neither a parochial nor a personal movement altogether. It was essentially a Hindu movement in the defence of Hindu Dharma for the overthrow of the alien Muhammadan domination, for the establishment of an independent, powerful Hindu Empire.[37]

The document that Savarkar adduced to establish the above claim has been suspected of being inauthentic—intentionally forged in a later phase of history[38]—and its reliability was already doubted by Savarkar's contemporary, T. S. Shejwalkar.[39] Regardless of such doubts about its origin, the phrase 'Hindavi Swarajya' came to be frequently cited in

[33] See 'European intelligence: *Vilāyatī Batmī*', in *The Dnyanodaya* (Bombay, 1852), vol. xi, pp. 154–155.

[34] Derby, 2 April 1852, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 120, col. 559. The motion regarding the appointment of a select committee was moved on 2 April 1852, in the House of Lords. The prime minister, in his speech, reflected—at length—on the need to keep Indians under colonial tutelage and to train them politically for the purpose of their gradual attainment of self-government.

[35] *The Dnyanodaya*, vol. xi, p. 155, translation mine.

[36] See Savarkar's 'A foreword' in V. D. Savarkar, *Hindu-Pad-Padashahi: A Review of the Hindu Empire of Maharashtra* (Madras, 1925), p. vi.

[37] *Ibid*, p. 6.

[38] See Setu Madhava Rao Pagadi, 'The life and times of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj', in *Shivaji and Swarajya*, (ed.) Indian Institute of Public Administration Maharashtra Regional Branch (Bombay, 1975), p. 10.

[39] Shejwalkar, a nationalist scholar and an 'an important foil to Savarkar', sought to ensure 'that historical writing was rooted in disciplinary rigor and the careful use of primary-source evidence'; see J. Bakhle, *Savarkar and the Making of Hindutva* (Princeton, 2024), pp. 20, 302–310.

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myriad twentieth-century discussions of Shivaji's political stance and his resolve to build an empire.

More than 60 years after Savarkar's *Hindu-Pad-Padashahi*, historian Andre Wink observed that, in the eighteenth century, the concept of swarajya 'came in general use to denote Maratha sovereignty anywhere in India'. In a monograph that was published in 1986, Wink noted that, by establishing their sovereignty in parts of India, the Marathas did not deny 'the legitimacy of Muslim universal dominion and they never really shed the status of zamindars'. Hence, the idea of swarajya was marked by both 'conquest and subservience':

> Maratha *svarajya* was a form of 'zamindari sovereignty' not merely in the eyes of the Mughals but actually established by people who were often just one or two generations away from village or district zamindari status […]. We do not know if the term *svarajya* by itself was already used under Shivaji. Perhaps it was not until the early eighteenth century that it was first applied to those districts which were then alleged to have been included in Shivaji's kingdom before it was overrun by the Mughal armies.[40]

Wink's explanation of what the concept of swarajya signified in the eighteenth-century Maratha context thus had little in common with Savarkar's close identification of the signifier swarajya with a non-parochial Hindu political identity.

The various interpretations of Maratha swarajya that historians—both amateurs and professionals—have produced are not the main concern of the present inquiry. The above examples are nonetheless crucial: they remind us that the idea of swarajya had circulated for a long time in the era that preceded the British conquest of India. Although our knowledge of that prehistory is sufficient, a remarkable lacuna still exists in the present historiography of swarajya—few scholars have sought to track the events and processes that enabled the colonial-era modernisation of that term. Neither Savarkar's ethno-religious understanding of swarajya nor Wink's nuanced academic interpretation of that Maratha concept advances our inquiry into how swarajya came to be endowed with a new meaning after the dissolution of the Maratha empire. Nevertheless—as the example previously cited from the periodical *Dnyanodaya* suggests—the year 1852 can be treated as a *terminus ante quem* for dating the emergence of swarajya as a modern signifier. Admittedly, swarajya had acquired a new meaning by the middle of the nineteenth century—yet the older sense of swarajya as Maratha sovereignty was not made obsolete by such modernisation. This is indicated, for instance, by the interpretation of swarajya that was recorded in the 1857 edition of J. T. Molesworth's Marathi–English dictionary—in which it is glossed as a term that is 'applied to certain of the districts possessed by the Maráṭhás'.[41] On the other hand, in the 1847 edition of a corresponding English–Marathi dictionary, self-government is translated variously as *ātmaśāsana*, *ātmaniyamana*, and *ātmavaśa*.[42]

The above examples suggest that, in the pre-nationalist era, the use of swarajya as a vernacular equivalent of self-government had yet to attain widespread acceptance. They also tell us that, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, swarajya was not the

[40] A. Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-Century Maratha Svarajya* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 43.

[41] *A Dictionary: Marathi and English*, compiled by J. T. Molesworth and assisted by G. Candy and T. Candy, 2nd edn (Bombay, 1857), p. 879.

[42] These words can also be translated otherwise; my suggested translations are the following: *ātmaśāsana* (self-rule), *ātmaniyamana* (self-regulation), and *ātmavaśa* (self-subjection); see *A Dictionary: English and Marathi*, planned and commenced by J. T. Molesworth and continued and completed by T. Candy (Bombay, 1847), p. 657.

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only available vernacular counterpart for self-government; that signifier, nevertheless, came to be frequently used by influential figures in the wake of Viceroy Ripon's initiative to introduce political reforms in colonial India. Lord Ripon, the lieutenant of the liberal Prime Minister Gladstone, decided in the 1880s to promote local self-government. This drive to make up for—what has been termed—'the effacement of the colonised'[43] in the administration of the colonial state also stemmed from the project to 'expand the circle of Indian collaborators'.[44] In this phase of colonial history, English-educated groups were encouraged to throw their weight behind the reformist policies of the liberal viceroy. The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, which was a political forum that was used by the Indian elite of Bombay Presidency to both criticise and seek collaboration with the colonial state, had protested against the repressive policies of the conservative Viceroy Lytton but welcomed the reformist measures that were ushered in by the new viceroy.[45] The Sabha members took up the task of actively preaching, among people, the benefits of the policy of local self-government.[46]

Against this backdrop—as the idea of local self-government became much discussed and debated in the vernacular sphere—it is likely that swarajya emerged as a commonly used equivalent of self-government. In a long essay that was published in 1883, Lokahitawadi, for instance, noted the novelty of the expression *sthānika svarājya* as a translational equivalent of local self-government; he explained that expression by parsing all its constituent parts and focused attention on wide-ranging examples—drawn eclectically from literary texts, the Puranic tradition, the history of the caliphate, the recent history of the Marathas, etc.—to elucidate the scope and significance of the expression *rājya* (state/government). The essay also extolled the rule of Queen Victoria for having brought significant improvement to India—a land that, it was noted, had previously experienced many tyrannical or dysfunctional rulers. As a loyal communicator of the viceroy's views, Lokahitawadi sought to persuade his readers to unreservedly embrace the policy of local self-government and expressed his hope that the implementation of such reformist policies would continue in the future.[47] This collaborationist ethos survived well into the nationalist era of Indian history and influenced—further on—modern uses of swaraj.

Swaraj and collaboration

This section charts the trajectory of the expression *Swarajya* in the early years of the Indian nationalist movement. To begin with, a crucial—albeit largely overlooked—contribution by Kashinath Trimbak Telang deserves our attention. Whereas Dadabhai Naoroji's foregrounding of swaraj as the foremost aim of the nationalist movement is well known, the role that was played by his younger colleague Telang—in the recasting of swarajya as a modern political term—is rarely examined and appreciated. This omission is all the more puzzling, as Telang—like Naoroji—was a founder of the Indian National Congress and a member of its 'inner circle'.[48] To remedy this egregious lacuna, I focus attention here on the context and significance of Telang's Marathi translation of an English text—*Local Government* (1883)—that was meant to facilitate the dissemination of the idea of local self-government in the vernacular sphere. The author of *Local Government*,

[43] G. Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton, 1999), p. 112.

[44] S. Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885–1947* (New York, 1989), p. 13.

[45] G. Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism: Bombay and the Indian National Congress 1880–1915* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 91–92.

[46] *Allen's Indian Mail and Official Gazette*, 14 September 1884.

[47] See Lokahitawadi, 'Sthānika Svarājya Vyavasthā', in *Lokahitawadi: Samagra Vāṅmaya*, (eds.) G. Parikh and I. Parikh (Bombay, 1988), vol. 1, pp. 139–165.

[48] S. R. Mehrotra, *A History of the Indian National Congress: Volume One, 1885–1918* (Delhi, 1995), p. 111.

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Mackenzie Chalmers,[49] was a well-known figure in the legal circles of late Victorian and Edwardian England. This Oxford-educated legal scholar's relationship with British India was established when he first arrived there after passing the Indian Civil Service exams and was appointed as a magistrate near Allahabad in his early twenties. He decided to leave after a few years of service,[50] but—as Curzon once noted—for Chalmers, 'the East was always calling'[51] and hence he returned again in 1896 as a legal member of the viceroy's council.

Both Chalmers' English-language text and Telang's Marathi translation *Sthānika Rājyavyavasthā*[52] were topical contributions that were made in the era of Gladstonian liberalism in the late Victorian British empire. In 1885, when the translation appeared, Telang was considered an acclaimed lawyer and public figure; he had joined the Bombay bar in 1872 and, alongside two other renowned lawyers—Pherozeshah Mehta and Badruddin Tyabji—he came to be celebrated as the triumvirate of Bombay's political life.[53] All three of these accomplished legal luminaries were involved in founding the Bombay Presidency Association in January 1885.[54] Telang—an illustrious collaborator of the Ripon administration—had been a nominated member of the Bombay Legislative Council in 1884; he was counted among the most prominent members of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha and had served as a member of the Education Commission of 1882 (the Hunter Commission). The report that was brought out by the Commission had recommended the promotion of vernacular instructions at the primary level and highlighted the crucial role that municipal and local boards should play in promoting such education.[55] In agreement with this suggestion, Telang had spoken in favour of expanding the use of the vernaculars for school teaching.[56] Considered against this backdrop, Telang's translation of Chalmers' book appears to have been simultaneously a means to support the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha's drive to popularise Ripon's reformist policies and a crucial contribution to the library of vernacular texts that were appropriate for the purpose of public instruction.[57]

The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, which was published in 1885—the same year as Telang's work of translation—includes a glossary that explains the Indian words that were left untranslated in that text; *svarāj* features in the list and is explained as 'Maratha home rule'.[58] This historically specific use of swarajya, it appears, was still common when Telang did his translation work. Nonetheless, like Lokahitawadi before him, Telang marked a clear departure by rendering self-government—a modern political concept in Chalmers' book—as *svarājya:*

> In England local affairs for the most part are administered by the inhabitants of the particular local areas or their representatives. Local self-government (*sthānika*

[49] M. D. Chalmers, *Local Government* (London, 1883). *Local Government* was published by Macmillan and Co. as a part of a series of civics textbooks dubbed as 'English Citizen Series'.

[50] G. Pearson, 'Relevance of Mackenzie Chalmers to Australian law', *Australian Law Journal* 85.2 (2011), p. 97.

[51] See 'Farewell dinner to Sir James Westland and Mr M.D. Chalmers, 23rd March 1899', in *Speeches of Lord Curzon of Kedleston, Viceroy and Governor-General of India: 1898–1901* (London, 2022), p. 99.

[52] K. T. Telang, *Sthānika Rājyavyavasthā* (Bombay, 1885).

[53] V. N. Naik, *Kashinath Trimbak Telang: The Man and His Times* (Madras, 1895), p. 113.

[54] *Ibid*, p. 117.

[55] J. Johnston, *Abstract and Analysis of the Report of the 'Indian Education Commission', with Notes and 'The Recommendations' in Full* (London, 1884), pp. 158–163.

[56] M. Jasbhai, *A Memorandum on Our Vernaculars, as Media of Elementary Instruction; and the Development of Vernacular Literature, with Special Reference to Technical Education* (Bombay, 1899), pp. 144–145.

[57] Naik, *Kashinath Trimbak Telang*, p. 71.

[58] Government of Bombay, *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* 18.2 (1885), p. 524.

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> *svarājya*) is the prevailing system. Constitutional writers lay great stress on its political importance. They, regard a vigorous system of local self-government as the chief corner-stone of political freedom (*rāṣṭriya svātantrya*). […] 'The principle of local self-government (*sthānika svarājya*),' say the Royal Sanitary Commission of 1869, 'has been generally recognised as the essence of our national vigour'.[59]

Cited from the introductory pages of *Local Government*, the above sentences demonstrate that Chalmers focused attention on the institutions of self-government as they had developed in England. By means of his translation of Chalmers' idea of self-government, Telang was thus able to repeatedly associate the signifier *Swarajya* with British historical referents that were unrelated to India's past.

It is necessary to add here that Chalmers' work, despite being a scholarly treatise, was not uncontaminated by the prevailing imperial ideology of the late Victorian era. Chalmers very rarely ventured beyond what he called 'our system of Local Government' to bring within his analytical frames the local government institutions that existed elsewhere. Nonetheless, in some instances, India was discussed—and the superiority of the metropolitan institutions as compared with the colonial ones was prominently highlighted. Chalmers cited the ideas of Henry Maine, who served as a Legal Member of the Governor-General's Council in India in the 1860s, to explain why local self-government in India could not be considered an alien tradition:

> The Englishman in India is brought face to face with archaic forms of life in perfect preservation, and the study of an Indian village as Sir H. S. Maine has shown, may throw a curious light on much that is unintelligible in our own local customs and institutions. It seems strange that two branches of the Aryan race, starting with institutions so similar, should develop such different histories. Be the cause of this divergence what it may, the history of India shows that self-governing local institutions, possessed of intense vitality, may exist apart from any form of representative government, and be successfully administered by a people who have no notion of political freedom.[60]

These words, published in 1883, appear to have been intended to suture the ideological divide in British administrative and policymaking circles that Ripon's decision to introduce local self-government in India had brought forth.

James Fitzjames Stephen—Henry Maine's successor in the viceroy's council—had been, on record, highly critical of Ripon's experiments with liberal governance in India; such reformist tendencies were considered by him to be obsequious 'truckling to popular prejudices and commonplaces' and he condemned all such attempts to 'hold out all sorts of delusive expectations to natives'.[61] Chalmers' use of the views of Maine—who was not enthusiastic about the introduction of liberal reforms in India—to assail the opinion that the idea of self-government was foreign to India was hence a clever strategy. The adoption of this tactic was also indicative of an attempt to articulate a middle ground between the imperialist liberals and anti-liberals on the question of Ripon's reforms. It is likely that this suggestion of a compromise that appeared in *Local Government* made it a suitable text for translation in the eyes of a figure such as Telang, who sought to back Ripon's reformist agenda. It is not unlikely that Telang's contemporaries—Naoroji and other nationalist figures in Bombay Presidency—were aware of

[59] Chalmers, *Local Government*, p. 4; Telang, *Sthānika Rājyavyavasthā*, p. 6.
[60] Chalmers, *Local Government*, p. 7.
[61] J. F. Stephen, 'Foundations of the Government of India', *The Nineteenth Century* 14.80 (1883), p. 567.

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Telang's use of swarajya as the vernacular equivalent of self-government and they later followed the precedent that he had set in the 1880s.

The political influence of Naoroji—the foremost legal luminary of turn-of-the-century India and the first Indian to be elected to the British parliament—was prominent enough in the early twentieth-century Indian psyche for him to have been named the father of the nation by Gandhi, years before Gandhi himself came to acquire that epithet.[62] In his inaugural address as president at the 22nd session of the Indian National Congress in December 1906, Naoroji praised British constitutional principles copiously. But he also wore his political hat, upheld India as 'a partner in the empire', and put forth a demand for Indian self-government as he spoke these words: 'We do not ask any favours. We want only justice. Instead of going into any further divisions or details of our rights as British citizens, the whole matter can be comprised in one word- 'Self-government' or swaraj like that of the United Kingdom or the Colonies.'[63]

This Naorojian swaraj was reminiscent of Telang's prior use of swarajya. It is nonetheless noteworthy that, in stark contrast to the era of Ripon's reforms—when Indian leaders had endorsed the introduction self-government at the level of elementary local institutions—nationalist leaders in 1906 were ambitious enough to make a demand for the introduction of self-government at all levels. They argued that 'the administration in all services, departments and details should be in the hands of the people themselves of India'.[64]

The appearance of swaraj in Naoroji's speech has invited considerable scholarly attention, but few have sufficiently explained Naoroji's decision to include an Indian term in a speech that was otherwise almost devoid of non-English expressions.[65] This decision lacks an obvious explanation—but some scope for speculation exists. When Telang brought out his translation of *Local Government*, nationalism was still in its early phase. However, when Naoroji famously promoted *Swaraj*, the nationalists in India had already outgrown their incipient, formative phase and had come up with a bold response to the colonial government's unilateral decision to partition Bengal. The decision to introduce swaraj as an untranslated word into the English-language presidential address of 1906 was likely an acknowledgement of this emerging domain of mass politics—abundantly supported by vernacular discourses and discussions in the vernacular press—that thrived outside the limited circles of the English-speaking professional elite.

Internationally, too, the scene had changed. As Naoroji pointed out in his address, self-government was granted to the Boers in South Africa shortly after they were defeated by the British forces in 1902. The fact that a policy of reconciliation was adopted so soon after years of bitter conflict, and that the British had pledged not to racially discriminate among their subjects, gave Naoroji the reason to argue that Indians should be granted their self-government, too, and he thought that would be 'an honourable fulfilment of all […] British pledged rights'. Campbell-Bannerman's government played an active role in restoring autonomy to the Boer territories in South Africa and this 'revival' of what Naoroji called 'the old noble British instincts of liberty and self-government' was also expected to generate opinion of the British rulers in favour of self-government in India.[66]

[62] D. Patel, *Naoroji: Pioneer of Indian Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA, 2020), p. 5.

[63] *Report of the Twenty-Second Indian National Congress Held at Calcutta* (Calcutta, 1907), p. 21.

[64] *Ibid*, p. 20.

[65] Dinyar Patel calls Naoroji's adoption of the vernacular term swaraj significant and suggests that the term was popularised by Tilak. What remains unexplained, though, is the sudden need to endorse, on Naoroji's part, a vernacular term as an equivalent of 'self-government'; see Patel, *Naoroji*, p. 247.

[66] *Report of the Twenty-Second Indian National Congress*, p. 20.

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Through his seemingly pleonastic recourse to the Marathi equivalent of self-government, Naoroji encouraged a practice that had already been in existence for some time: the appropriation of a signifier that was associated with the history of the Maratha empire in order to endow it with a modern political meaning. Although more than two decades had passed between the time at which Telang used the word swarajya and Naoroji used swaraj, no noticeable or obvious semantic shift can be claimed to have taken place between these two attempts to establish an Indian equivalent of self-government. This discernible lack of semantic movement can be attributed to the similar political stances that were adopted by both Telang and Naoroji—both were critical of the economic policies of the Raj, and yet they shared the same horizon of expectations: a horizon that was structured by imperial liberalism. Telang, for instance, had continued his collaboration with the colonial government despite the failure of the liberal imperial administration to make the judicial process apply equally to Europeans and Indians. Naoroji, too, was hopeful that the British, true to their revered liberal principles of governance, would introduce policy changes gradually and these would incrementally secure India's movement towards self-governance. He made no secret of his intention to avoid encouraging abrupt or revolutionary changes by the nationalists and—perhaps anticipating adverse reactions from the English-language press (that quickly reached the conclusion that '*Swaraj* is a dangerous doctrine')[67]—in his speech, Naoroji mentioned the following to reassure those who were likely to be alarmed by the proposed resolution on self-government: 'Nobody would, I think, say that the whole present machinery can be suddenly broken up at once and the rights which I have defined of self-government can be at once introduced.'[68]

These words from Naoroji's address that cautioned against any radical departure from the established rules also remind us of his abiding affiliation to a variety of collaborationist nationalism[69] that was coming under strain in the early twentieth century but was still not set aside by the Congress leadership. The signifier swaraj, however, was not invoked within the sphere of such collaborationist politics alone. To better account for the modernisation of swaraj and its emergence as an untranslatable, we need to look beyond the semantic horizon of liberal politics within which the legal luminaries such as Telang and Naoroji sought to relocate the term. For this purpose, we examine below instances in which swaraj was construed by colonial administrators as a suspect signifier and as an idea that signalled the birth of a radical confrontational stance of the Indian subjects of the Raj.

Swarajya and sedition

From the above analysis of the two early uses of swaraj, as suggested by Telang and Naoroji, 20 years apart, we might make the mistaken assumption that nothing happened in the intervening period that called into question the translational equivalence between self-government and swarajya. History, however, rarely moves in a linear fashion. In the wake of the third bubonic plague pandemic of the 1890s, a series of events transpired in India that made swaraj—outside the enclosures of liberal politics—much more than just

[67] *Ibid*, p. 115.

[68] *Ibid*, p. 21.

[69] R. Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), p. 43. Guha calls Gandhi's argument in favour of assisting the British forces during the Second Boer War a 'classic text of collaborationist nationalism'. This, however, was not just a descriptive label for Guha, as he offered—drawing on Gramsci's theorisation of hegemony—a detailed explanation for the idea of collaboration. In this article, the expression 'collaborationist nationalism'—used by Guha to characterise a key trend in Gandhi's early political career in South Africa—is also used to describe the ideology of the early nationalists.

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an anodyne social scientific expression. I demonstrate below that, in the changed political scenario of the post-pandemic India, the colonial state started to associate subversive nationalist objectives with the signifier swaraj.

At the end of the nineteenth century, a plague outbreak occurred in China. The pandemic reached Bombay, the premier port city of British India, in 1896[70] and, by early 1897, it had travelled to other major cities of Bombay Presidency, such as Pune (Poona).[71] In March 1897, under the chairmanship of British civilian W. C. Rand (I.C.S.), a plague committee was appointed in Pune to contain the pandemic. The containment policies of the colonial administration included the entering and searching of private premises to look for diseased individuals or to ascertain 'if any corpse is concealed there'. The emergency rules also allowed the forced eviction of individuals from buildings that were deemed unfit for habitation.[72] Rand's strict implementation of such policies angered the locals greatly. On the evening of 22 June 1897, Rand and Lieutenant Charles Ayerst (who happened to accompany Rand at that time) were fired at by assailants, who were later captured and executed. Ayerst died immediately and Rand succumbed to the gunshot wounds a few days later.[73]

About two decades after Rand and Ayerst's assassination, a committee was appointed under the presidentship of Justice Rowlatt to produce an investigative report on the 'criminal conspiracies connected with the revolutionary movement' in India. The committee found the 'first indications' of such conspiracies in 'the events at Poona in 1897'[74] and condemned Bal Gangadhar Tilak for his alleged legitimisation of the use of violence against government personnel. In 1897, Tilak had yet to become an acclaimed figure in the countrywide political arena. But he was already a member of the Council of the Governor of Bombay and a popular leader who was unafraid to severely criticise the administration's measures for containing the plague. Tilak, it was argued, had published, in his newspaper *Kesari*, opinions that imputed 'to the Government itself a deliberate direction to oppress the people'[75] and hence he was tried and convicted for publishing inflammatory writings under section 124A of the Indian Penal Code.

Despite recognising the importance of Tilak's indictment in its narration of the birth of 'revolutionary conspiracies' in India, the Rowlatt Sedition Commission's report said nothing about the indispensable role that translators had played in making the case against Tilak. At the trial, the prosecutors had to cite, as evidence, the texts that they had deemed seditious. These allegedly seditious articles, published in *Kesari*, were translated from Marathi and made accessible to the judge and the jurors, who lacked the knowledge of the Indian vernaculars. On 27 July 1897, the Oriental Translator to Government Mirza Abbas Ali Baig was asked by the government to lodge a complaint against Tilak. As Baig had translated and made available the necessary evidence to the Police Magistrate, during the trial, the prosecution chose Baig as their first witness; he was also cross-examined by a lawyer who was representing Tilak.[76] Ascertainment of the accuracy of the translations that were presented as exhibits in the trial thus emerged as a major concern for both the prosecution and the defence.

The two articles for which Tilak was charged for sedition were published on 15 June 1897 in *Kesari*. The first of these was a poem called 'Shivaji's utterances' that was written

[70] C. Benedict, *Bubonic Plague in Nineteenth-Century China* (Stanford, 1996), p. 1.
[71] R. Nathan, *The Plague in India, 1896, 1897*, 4 vols (Simla, 1898), vol. i, p. 53.
[72] *Ibid*, vol. ii, p. 162.
[73] I. J. Catanach, 'Poona politicians and the plague', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 7.2 (1984), p. 1.
[74] *Sedition Committee Report 1918* (Calcutta, 1918), pp. xv, 1–4.
[75] *Ibid*, pp. 2–3.
[76] S. S. Setlur and K. G. Deshpande, *A Full and Authentic Report of the Trial of the Hon'ble Mr. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, B.A., LL.B at the Fourth Criminal Sessions 1897* (Bombay, 1897), p. 15.

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by an anonymous author and it portrayed a scene of an imagined resurrection of the seventeenth-century Maratha King Shivaji.[77] The second article reported on the ceremonies that were held on 12 June 1897 to commemorate a historical event: Shivaji's coronation. As he argued the prosecution's case, the advocate general claimed that the articles in question did not merely draw attention of the readers to 'a sort of historical dissertation as to the character of Shivaji', but were published with the aim 'to incite' the Indian subjects of the Raj 'to imitate the example of Shivaji and subvert and overthrow the Government'.[78] The historical facts and references that were used in the articles were subjected to the colonial state's hermeneutics of suspicion; instead of treating them as constative statements, the prosecution looked upon them as components of a larger nationalist performative that were aimed primarily to inspire anti-colonial ideas and actions.

Swarajya—as an untranslated term—made its appearance in this climate of suspicion. 'Shivaji's utterances' imagined Shivaji's return to colonial India and recounted his lament upon witnessing the worsening condition of what used to be his empire or the swarajya where, under colonial rule, 'relentless death moves about spreading epidemics of diseases'.[79] Two distinct translations were made of this poem and both were made available as exhibits to the judge and the jury. The prosecution relied upon the first of these two translations—identified in the trial documents as the official translation—to make its case. Tilak's counsel Pugh, in contrast, relied on the second translation—identified during the trial as the literal translation—to make the case for the defence. I cite below the first few sentences from both of these translations for a brief comparative consideration of their uses of swarajya:

> Translation 1: By annihilating the wicked I lightened the great weight on the terraqueous globe. I delivered the country by establishing Swarajya […] by saving religion, I betook myself to heaven to shake off the great exhaustion which had come upon me. I was asleep, why then did you, my darlings, awaken me?[80]

> Translation 2: Having destroyed the wicked, I greatly lessened the burden of the earth, I rescued the country by establishing my kingdom and saving religion. Great fatigue overtook me to drive which I betook myself to the heavenly world. I was sleeping then Why, O dear ones! did then you in the meanwhile awaken me.[81]

The first translation, which was used to establish the charge against Tilak, preserved the term *Swarajya* as untranslated. The second translation, which was used by the defence team to make their case, substituted the phrase 'my kingdom' in the place of swarajya. The prosecution hence sought to maintain, rather than efface, swarajya as the name for a concrete historical phenomenon: the rise of the Marathas at the western periphery of the Mughal empire. This decision, nonetheless, did not merely evince a care for historical accuracy. The prosecution's case was built on the assumption that the invocation of swarajya had served a political purpose.

The colonial state's fear of the potential political uses of swarajya was well explained in (the presiding judge of Tilak's trial) Justice Strachey's final communication to the jury. According to Strachey, the prosecution objected to 'Shivaji's utterances' because it

[77] *Ibid*, 'Appendix A: Exhibits for the prosecution', p. 1.
[78] *Ibid*, p. 5.
[79] *Ibid*, p. 19.
[80] *Ibid*, 'Appendix A: Exhibits for the prosecution', p. 1.
[81] *Ibid*, 'Appendix B: Exhibits for the defence', p. 72.

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aimed 'to draw the sharpest possible contrast between India as it was in Shivaji's time and India under the British Government, to the greatest possible disadvantage of the latter'. The poem in question, the prosecution had claimed, also 'held up to admiration and gratitude the condition of the country in Shivaji's time' and then blamed foreign rule for having ruined the country 'in such a way as to incite the utmost possible prejudice, race prejudice, religious prejudice, every kind of prejudice against the British Government'.[82] Such statements indicate that, in the post-pandemic India of the 1890s, in the eyes of the colonial administrators, swarajya did not come across as a benign Indian equivalent of self-government. Nor was the term construed exclusively in its historical sense—that is, a name for the Maratha empire.

Due to the attention that Tilak's trial subsequently drew—from the English-language press and the law journals that were reporting the trial—swarajya became a relatively better known term of Indian origin.[83] The state prosecutors persuasively associated invocations of swarajya with the advocacy of a possible restoration of the precolonial rule of the natives and Telang's staid social scientific use of that term was nearly forgotten. Nonetheless, as already noted, a further semantic movement took place in 1906 when Naoroji, a liberal nationalist, argued that swaraj should be treated as the fulfilment of the rights of Indians as 'British citizens'.[84] This conciliatory gesture did not eliminate the colonial suspicion regarding the potential seditiousness of the Indian subjects who vociferously proclaimed their right to swarajya. Naoroji's 1906 address, however, did make a difference; it saved activists from being routinely penalised for their endorsement of swaraj and this became evident in the *Beni Bhusan Roy v. The Emperor* case.[85]

On 15 July 1907, Beni Bhusan Roy was fined by the District Magistrate of Khulna for advocating the securing of swaraj in the course of a speech. In response, Roy petitioned the High Court, seeking a revision of the Magistrate's decision. While setting aside the prior decision the High Court glossed on the meaning of swaraj:

> The word Swaraj, if it was used, does not necessarily mean Government of the country to the exclusion of the present Government, but its ordinary acceptance is 'home rule' under the Government. The vernacular word used, if literally translated, would mean self-government but self-government would not necessarily mean the exclusion of the present Government or independence. It may mean, as it is well understood, government by the people themselves under the King and under British sovereignty.[86]

Hence, the High Court offered an interpretation of swaraj that reiterated Naoroji's explanation of that term. *Beni Bhusan Roy v. The Emperor* became a key precedent for the future cases of sedition,[87] as it declared that seditious speech should not be identified by attending to individual words, but by engaging in more substantial analysis of the actual meaning of the words that were suspected of encouraging sedition.

The colonial authority's suspicion concerning invocations of swaraj was nonetheless strengthened in the years that followed the first partition of Bengal as the 'moderates'

[82] *Ibid*, 'Charge to the jury', p. 18.

[83] 'The incriminating articles', *The Times of India*, 30 July 1897, p. 5; H. C. Trapnell, 'Indian press prosecutions', *The Law Quarterly Review* 14.53 (1898), p. 82; *The Indian Law Reports, Bombay Series: Containing Cases Determined by the High Court at Bombay* 22 (1898), p. 113; *The Law Journal: A Weekly Publication of Notes of Cases and Legal News* 35 (1900), p. 511; J. Ghosal, *Celebrated Trials in India*, 2 vols (Calcutta, 1902), vol. i, p. 150.

[84] *Report of the Twenty-Second Indian National Congress*, p. 20.

[85] 'What does swaraj mean?', *The Times of India*, 22 August 1907, p. 9.

[86] B. R. Desai, *Desai's Handbook of Criminal Cases: A Verbatim Reprint of all Criminal Cases Reported in the Indian Law Reports for the year 1907–11*(Baroda, 1912), p. 50.

[87] *Ibid*, p. 103.

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and 'extremists' in the Indian National Congress failed to reach a workable consensus on the means to be followed in their common struggle against the British Raj. In the wake of the Muzaffarpur bombing of 30 April 1908, a crackdown on the extremists was mounted. In May and June 1908, Tilak, who had, by this time, emerged as the foremost of the leaders who were advocating for a more confrontational variety of nationalism, published two articles ('The country's misfortune!' and 'These remedies are not lasting') in connection with the Muzaffarpur assassinations. As these articles were deemed to be seditious by the administration, Tilak was charged and tried yet again by the colonial state.[88] The prosecution's exhibits included translations of the Marathi texts that were considered seditious. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, in the bail application that he made on behalf of Tilak, expressed doubts about the quality of these translations.[89] While participating in the cross-examination of Bhaskar Vishnu Joshi, the First Assistant Oriental Translator to Government and the first witness to be called by the prosecution, Tilak himself disputed the accuracy of the official translations of his essays.[90] Hence, much like the 1897 trial, during the 1908 trial, the strategy of the defence was to draw the judge's attention to the possibility that the translators who were employed by the state might have misrepresented the original texts.

Given this emphasis that was placed on translation, it was of great significance that swarajya appeared as an untranslated term in the translations of Tilak's articles that the prosecution included in its exhibits. Let us examine, for instance, the two excerpted sections that are adduced as examples below. The first excerpt is from the article entitled 'The country's misfortune!' and the second is from the article entitled 'These remedies are not lasting':

1. However enlightened the self-interest of the rulers might be, India must still be a loser thereby; and in order to prevent this loss the power in the hands of the white official class must gradually come into our hands; there is no other alternative such is now the view of many people in India and it is gaining ground. […] However the desire of the people gradually to obtain the rights of *Swarajya* is growing stronger and stronger. If they do not get rights by degrees, as desired by them, then some people at least out of the subject population, being filled with indignation or exasperation, will not fail to embark upon the commission of improper or horrible deeds recklessly.[91]

2. Government should never allow keen disappointment (to take hold) of (the minds of) those intelligent persons who have been awakened (to the necessity of) securing the rights of *swarajya*. Government should not forget that when the desires and aspirations of the awakened intelligent people spread throughout the nation and begin rudely to awaken the whole nation, the disappointment instead of decreasing becomes all the more keen, if this process of awakening is stopped at such a time. […] The real and lasting means of stopping bombs consists in making a beginning to grant the important rights of *swarajya* (to the people).[92]

In the first excerpt, Tilak favours the idea of a gradual attainment of political rights. But he also warns that people might act recklessly and commit 'improper or horrible

[88] *Sedition Committee Report 1918*, p. 6.
[89] See 'Magisterial proceedings', in Kelkar, *Full and Authentic Report of the Tilak Trial*, p. 16.
[90] *Ibid*, p. 38.
[91] See 'Prosecution exhibits (A to M2)', in Kelkar, *Tilak Trial*, p. 5.
[92] *Ibid*, p. 20.

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deeds' unless such rights are yielded to them. There is no indication here that Tilak meant to repudiate the Naorojian definition of swaraj. Similarly, in the second excerpt, we can see that Tilak admonishes the colonial government for ignoring 'desires and aspirations of the awakened intelligent people'. Tilak then adds the remedy that would be necessary to stop such people from taking the path of violence: only by granting them the 'rights of Swarajya' can their undue radicalisation be stalled. Here, too, it appears that no clear departure from the Naorojian sense of swaraj can be discerned.

Despite Tilak's adherence to the idea of swaraj as defined by Naoroji, the translators of the documents that formed the basis of Tilak's indictment decided to keep the signifier *Swarajya* as untranslated. We might attribute this to the fact that—thanks to the popularity that swaraj gained after 1906—swaraj/swarajya had truly attained the status of an untranslatable signifier. But it can also be argued that—unlike the verdict that was delivered in the *Beni Bhusan Roy v. The Emperor* case—in Tilak's 1908 trial, the prosecution retained swaraj as an untranslated term in order to reaffirm its presumed status as a suspect signifier. Mr. Inverarity, who appeared for the prosecution, claimed in his opening address that Tilak's *Kesari* had its 'own definition of Swarajya and it apparently meant that whenever the people like to upset the Government they are entitled to do so'.[93]

The above examples from Tilak's trial documents remind us that—despite the prior affirmations of the equivalence between swaraj and self-government by Naoroji and others—as late as 1908, swaraj/swarajya did not acquire a singular and definitive meaning. Moreover, the introduction of self-government and swaraj as synonymous terms in Naoroji's speech had unintended consequences. Whereas the expression swaraj gained international recognition[94] and came to be uniquely associated with Indian politics, the proposed equivalence between that signifier and self-government gained much less prominence and acceptance.[95] Before Gandhi started drafting his famous treatise, swaraj had appeared for a number of years as an untranslated Indian term in multiple English-language texts, but—as indicated above—it was still a semantically unstable expression. As a signifier without a clearly defined signified, swaraj was therefore readily amenable to the makeover that Gandhi intended for it. And hence, between 13 and 22 November 1909, on board the ship *Kildonan Castle*, a post-Naorojian swaraj was born.[96] Next, we turn to the history of this Gandhian renewal of swaraj and its political consequences.

Gandhi and swaraj

In Gandhi's treatise *Hind Swaraj*, the Naorojian sense of swaraj was not preserved. Furthermore, by making the attainment of swaraj conditional upon the recognition and recovery of India's civilisational superiority and then by associating both Indian civilisation and swaraj with non-violence, in his treatise, Gandhi sought to pre-empt any possible appropriations of that term by the proponents of nationalist terror and extremist politics. The departure from the Naorojian swaraj was also signalled by Gandhi's decision to introduce a 'distinction between Swaraj as self-government or the quest for home rule or the good state, and Swaraj as self-rule or the quest for self- improvement'.[97] Gandhi was thus able to emphasise that swaraj had to be 'experienced by each one for himself'.[98]

[93] See 'Magisterial proceedings', in Kelkar, *Tilak Trial*, p. 33.

[94] See e.g. P. Dahmen, 'Le swaraj ou l'Inde aux Indiens', *Études* 44.113 (1907), pp. 557–570.

[95] The signifier swaraj kept surfacing as a suspect signifier in the colonial court rooms; see e.g. 'Bombay sedition case: the "Aurunodaya" charged', *The Times of India*, 9 June 1908, p. 5.

[96] See 'Introduction', in Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, p. xiv.

[97] *Ibid*, p. xv.

[98] *Ibid*, p. 73.

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Instances, nevertheless, can be found from both the South African and the post-South African periods of Gandhi's life in which his pronouncements on swaraj resembled the Naorojian views of the same.

Some early mentions of swarajya by Gandhi—in the articles that were published in *Indian Opinion*—were made before Naoroji's espousal of the cause of swaraj in 1906. A brief examination of those early instances should lead us to a better understanding of Gandhi's later—more mature—pronouncements on swaraj. It is crucial to first consider the historical backdrop of Gandhi's politics in early twentieth-century South Africa. To begin with, we should recall that the British victory in the Anglo–Boer War did not lead to a better life for non-White populations in South Africa. Despite their defeat, the Afrikaner political class managed to reassert their dominance; they promoted British industrial interests in their territories and secured tacit British support for the establishment of White supremacy in South Africa.[99] In 1905, upon observing the increasing marginalisation of the non-White communities in South Africa, Gandhi speculated: 'There is not the slightest likelihood of the Dutch or the British granting the franchise to Indians on the attainment of self-government (swarajya).'[100] A year later—when Gandhi witnessed the suppression of Bambatha and his followers—he commented: 'The cause of self-government (swarajya) has triumphed; but the British Empire has received a set-back.'[101]

In 1906—the year of the advent of satyagraha—Gandhi 'acted as the stretcher-bearer of the Empire'[102] in the anti-Zulu war; this was also the time at which he took a markedly negative view of the White settler autonomy: 'wherever self-government (swarajya) has been granted, a people become overweening. They will take undue liberties, and the Imperial Government will hesitate to intervene.'[103] Subsequent events confirmed Gandhi's prognosis: the Boers in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State obtained self-government by 1907, but local Africans and Asian immigrants suffered disenfranchisement. In contrast to Gandhi's grim assessment of the introduction of self-government by the White settlers in South Africa, his pronouncements on the question of Indian self-government took on a more optimistic tone. Consider, for instance, Gandhi's short biographical account of British Brigadier General Henry Lawrence, who died in 1857 during the Siege of Lucknow. In that biography, which was published in *Indian Opinion* in 1905, Gandhi approvingly cited Lawrence's views on the purpose of the British presence in India: 'As trustees, the English were not to loot India, but to make the people prosperous, to teach them self-government (swarajya) and to make over the country to the Indian people in a prosperous state.'[104]

These instances demonstrate that, years before *Hind Swaraj*, swarajya as a translational equivalent of self-government had already appeared in Gandhi's observations that concerned the then-extant settler-colonial self-governments in South Africa and the prospects of self-government in India. However, such uses of swarajya as a culturally neutral term did not last long—in 1909, Gandhi marked Western institutions of self-

[99] C. R. Lovell, 'Afrikaner nationalism and Apartheid', *The American Historical Review* 61.2 (1956), p. 320.

[100] Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. iv, p. 452; Gandhi, *Akshardeha*, vol. iv, p. 510. Among Gujarati-language publications, older instances can be found of the use of swarajya as an equivalent of self-government. Years before the word started to appear in Gandhi's statements, swarajya had already been used, for instance, in a book that was published in the wake of Ripon's reformist initiative and reminiscent of Telang's effort to popularise the idea of self-government in the vernacular sphere; see K. M. Vakil, *Sthānika Svarājya* (Ahmedabad, 1886).

[101] Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. v, p. 266; Gandhi, *Akshardeha*, vol. v, p. 293.

[102] See A. Desai and G. Vahed, *The South African Gandhi: Stretcher-Bearer of Empire* (Stanford, 2016), p. 19. Desai and Vahed attend to the conciliatory strategies—discernible in Gandhi's South African career—whereby Gandhi sought to achieve 'limited integration into white South African society'.

[103] Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. v, p. 267; Gandhi, *Akshardeha*, vol. v, p. 294.

[104] Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. v, p. 103; Gandhi, *Akshardeha*, vol. v, p. 111.

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government as incommensurate with 'true' swaraj and unworthy of emulation. This unambiguous rejection of the Western model is stated in the fourth chapter of *Hind Swaraj*, 'What is swaraj'; toward the end of that chapter, 'the editor' upbraids 'the reader' for suggesting that Indians might get their self-government by imitating or importing English institutions. The reader is emphatically told: 'what you call Swaraj is not truly Swaraj.'[105] Here, the equivalence between swarajya and self-government—the model that Telang and Naoroji had adopted—breaks down and Gandhi's reconceptualisation of swaraj makes it a distinctly new idea. Nonetheless, we would be too quick to assume that this was the moment of Gandhi's irrevocable break with the past.

It is helpful here to recall that, in British India, *Hind Swaraj* was proscribed as soon as it appeared; at the time of Gandhi's repatriation from South Africa, that treatise had yet to be fully appreciated by Indian readers and interlocutors. It is likely that only after 1919—when the first Indian edition of *Hind Swaraj* was brought out—did Gandhi's treatise obtain a wide readership; it is also likely that the book gained an even larger number of readers after the release of its Hindi translation in 1921.[106] Hence, Gandhi—as a famous returnee from South Africa whose views were yet to be widely disseminated—was not in a position to immediately influence nationalist politics by giving it a new ideological orientation; instead, he had to negotiate pre-existing political and discursive trends that had not been shaped by him. During the war years, Indian leaders became increasingly vociferous in their opposition to the colonial administration; Tilak, who was released from prison in 1914, emerged as the leader of the nationalists who were agitating for self-government. The pronouncements regarding swarajya by Tilak were nonetheless cautious and close to the Naorojian understanding of self-government. He repeatedly reminded his audience that the nationalist demand for swarajya could only be misrepresented as a call for the repudiation of imperial allegiance.[107] In this climate, Gandhi, too, adopted a conciliatory approach to the empire—somewhat akin to the Congress politics of Naoroji's era.

In 1906, Naoroji claimed that Indians should be entitled to all British citizens' rights—including self-government—as India was 'a partner in the Empire'.[108] In 1918, Gandhi declared that 'partnership in the Empire' was what Indians should aim for and equated the refusal to back the colonial state's war effort to committing 'national suicide'.[109] Echoing the views of mainstream politicians of that era such as Gokhale and Tilak,[110] Gandhi wholeheartedly supported the war effort of India's 'would-be partner'—the British.[111] In a leaflet that was widely circulated in Kheda, Gandhi made an impassioned appeal for enlistment in the army by using words that were reminiscent of Naoroji's discourse:

> You are all lovers of swaraj; some of you are members of the Home Rule League. One meaning of Home Rule is that we should become partners in the Empire. Today we are a subject people. We do not enjoy all the rights of Englishmen. We are not today partners in the Empire as are Canada, South Africa and Australia. We are a dependency. We want the rights of Englishmen, and we aspire to be as much partners in the Empire as the Dominions overseas.[112]

[105] Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, p. 29.
[106] *Ibid*, 'Introduction', p. lviii; 'A note on the history of the text', p. lxiii.
[107] B. G. Tilak, *Bal Gangadhar Tilak: His Writings and Speeches* [with] *Appreciation by Babu Aurobindo Ghose* (Madras, 1922), *passim*.
[108] *Report of the Twenty-Second Indian National Congress*, p. 21.
[109] Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. xiv, p. 378.
[110] S. Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture: Writings, Images, and Songs* (Cambridge 2018), p. 60.
[111] Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. xiv, p. 428.
[112] *Ibid*, p. 440.

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Such statements stood in clear contrast to the view, as expressed in *Hind Swaraj*, that the attainment of 'Self-Government similar to what the Canadians and the South Africans have', in effect, would mean reinstating 'English rule without the Englishman'.[113]

Moreover, in August 1918, at a meeting in Surat, Gandhi declared: 'we are not entitled to demand swaraj till we come forward to enlist in the army.'[114] At the same time, by highlighting the need to acquire the capability for self-defence, he avoided addressing the violence that would inevitably result from joining the war: 'Can a nation, whose citizens are incapable of self-defence, enjoy swaraj? […] How can a people who are incapable of defending their lives, their women and children, their cattle and their lands, ever enjoy swaraj?'[115] By making such statements, Gandhi departed from his previously held position that violence is not 'necessary at any stage for reaching' swaraj.[116] Yet, such a proclamation of support for an imperial cause was not entirely uncharacteristic of Gandhi. In the early years of his political life in South Africa, while campaigning for the rights of the Indian diaspora, Gandhi had embraced opportunities to demonstrate his loyalty to the empire by participating in its war efforts. Nonetheless, as Gandhi graduated from being 'an isolated and part-time protagonist in the political field'[117] into an all-India leader, he dialled back his collaborationist rhetoric.

In 1919, Gandhi emerged as one of the principal leaders of both the Anti-Rowlatt movement and the Khilafat agitation. In August 1920, Gandhi repudiated his history of collaboration with the empire. He returned the awards that were previously conferred by various British administrations in recognition of his loyalty. The Boer War medal, which was awarded for his role during the Boer War of 1899, the Zulu War medal, which was given in recognition of his services in 1906, and the Kaiser-i-Hind—all were returned and Gandhi declared that he now had 'the gravest misgivings regarding the future of the Empire'.[118] This turn from conciliation to confrontation created the context for resuscitating the radically redefined Gandhian swaraj yet again. It is nonetheless crucial to note that, in the run-up to the Non-Cooperation Movement, the idealism of Gandhi's swaraj came to be tempered by the demands of realpolitik. From Annie Besant's campaign for home rule, Gandhi had learnt the crucial political lesson that swaraj can be presented as 'as a goal realisable in the immediate future'.[119] Thus, in 1920—eschewing his prioritisation of the temporally indeterminate process of attaining swaraj or establishing 'miniature and summarised zones of sovereignty' in 'self-ruling subjects'[120]—Gandhi declared to the members of the Indian National Congress that they 'can gain Swarajya in the course of an year'.[121]

Against this backdrop, swaraj—as a nationalist untranslatable—came into its own. Gandhi's championing of the term led to its entry into the official Congress creed. In light of the party's prior organisational history, this was a momentous departure. The 1908 Congress creed, or Article I of the Congress Constitution of 1908, had declared the establishment of self-government within the empire as being the aim of the Congress:

> Article 1 (1908)—The Object of the Indian National Congress are the attainment by the people of India of a system of government similar to that enjoyed by the self-

[113] Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, p. 28.
[114] Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. xv, p. 1.
[115] *Ibid*, p. 2.
[116] Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, p. 112.
[117] J. M. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915–1922* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 151.
[118] Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. xviii, p. 105.
[119] Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. xiv, p. 50.
[120] I. Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading* (Cambridge, MA, 2013) p. 152.
[121] M. Gandhi, *Swaraj in One Year* (Madras, 1921), p. 4.

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> governing Members of the British Empire and a participation by them in the rights and responsibilities of the Empire on equal terms with those Members. These Objects are to be achieved by constitutional means by bringing about a steady reform of the existing system of administration and by promoting national unity, fostering public spirit and developing and organising the intellectual, moral, economic and industrial resources of the country.[122]

By emphasising self-government on colonial lines and suggesting that only constitutional means should be followed to achieve that political aim, Article I of 1908 had played the role of an instrument to exclude the more radical of the nationalists. Gandhi, by moving a resolution to change Article I, effectively abandoned an entrenched orthodoxy that had for a long time regulated the political strategies of the Congress elite. On Gandhi's insistence, in 1920, Article I was wholly transformed. A resolution was moved to officialise the following statement as the new creed of the Congress: 'The object of the Indian National Congress is the attainment of Swarajya by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means.'[123] In Nagpur, before the adoption of this remarkably brief statement as the new creed, debates were held that sought to pin down the significance of swaraj.

In 1906, swaraj had a relatively transparent meaning and its use by Naoroji was meant to uphold the equivalence of the signifier 'self-government' with a word that was borrowed from Indian languages. However, by 1920, that moment of transparency had been irrevocably lost and swaraj was treated—as one delegate at the Nagpur session noted—as a 'magic word' that 'must not be interpreted'.[124] Hazrat Mohani—a key figure in both the Khilafat and Non-cooperation Movements—observed that, at the 1920 annual session of the Congress in Nagpur, swaraj was 'left undefined so that it might be open to the people to attach to it any meaning they liked'.[125] Thus, at the time at which the Non-Cooperation Movement was launched, swaraj became amenable to variable interpretations. Delegates in Nagpur attempted decipherments of the exact sense of swaraj and they became supporters or detractors of Gandhi's proposal to alter the Congress creed based on the meaning that they imputed to swaraj. C. Vijayaraghavachariar, who occupied the presidential chair at the Nagpur Congress, opposed the use of swaraj in the following terms:

> I venture to think that it is in our lasting interests that we designate the form of Government we seek simply responsible government like that of the United Kingdom and of the self-Government Dominions. I would not describe it by the Sanskrit word 'Swarajya'. Although this word means simply self Government or home rule, it is on the one hand capable of being misunderstood abroad […] and on the other hand it is devoid of historic conventions and usages which make for the healthy growth and development of responsible Government.[126]

President Vijayaraghavachariar was not alone in voicing reservations about swarajya. But not everyone who was advising against the use of that untranslated term reiterated the president's argument. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, for instance, opposed swarajya because he thought that its use was 'not qualified' in the amended version of the Article I that

[122] See 'Appendix B', in *Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Indian National Congress Held at Madras* (Madras, 1909), p. xix.
[123] *Report of the Thirty-Fifth Indian National Congress* (Nagpur, 1921), p. 46.
[124] *Ibid*, p. 63.
[125] *Report of the Thirty-Sixth Indian National Congress* (Ahmedabad, 1922), p. 52.
[126] *Report of the Thirty-Fifth Indian National Congress*, p. 13.

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was proposed by Gandhi. According to him, that word meant nothing else but 'complete independence'. In addressing Gandhi and the supporters of the amendment, he thus uttered the following words of admonition: 'I say that at this moment you are making a declaration which you have not the means to carry out. On the other hand you are exposing your hand to your enemies.'[127] Jinnah also expressed doubts about the prospect of attaining a peaceful transition to complete independence as Gandhi had suggested in his resolution.

In 1907, Lala Lajpat Rai had declared that, to Indian nationalists, swaraj was a 'war-cry' and an 'all-inspiring and all-absorbing aim in life'.[128] In 1920, he came forth as a vocal supporter of the proposal to alter the Congress creed. Having fully endorsed Gandhi's resolution, Rai responded to those who asked for a clear interpretation of swaraj in the following way:

> Some of my friends say that it is a dubious phrase 'Swaraj'. If they mean by this that the phrase had two meanings, within or without the British Empire, without making it clear, I will say that they are right because the word has been deliberately used for the purpose of enabling us to remain within this Commonwealth if we choose when that Commonwealth had been established or go out of it when we like. In that sense that word may be construed to have a double meaning. It has no double meaning but it is a word which leaves the choice of the two conditions to us.[129]

From the words of Rai, we can surmise that the admission of swaraj into the Congress Constitution in its untranslated form served a strategic purpose. Equivocations on the question of swaraj were aimed at leaving the nationalist leadership some wiggle room as they prognosticated the possible outcomes of the Non-Cooperation Movement and hedged their bets. In 1921, Hasrat Mohani made an attempt to change the creed yet again. He moved a resolution at the Ahmedabad session of the Congress that effectively sought to define swaraj as 'complete independence, free from all foreign control'.[130] Mohani's resolution was undoubtedly encouraged by the considerable popularity that the new movement had already achieved despite having failed to obtain 'swaraj in one year'.[131] Gandhi, nonetheless, opposed Mohani and cautioned against radically redefining the term: 'Let us not go into waters whose depths we do not know and this proposition of Mr. Hazrat Mohani lands you into depths unfathomable.'[132] This opposition to associating swaraj with a definitive meaning reminds us that the semantic vagueness that was attributed to the term was not fortuitous, but intended. Gandhi's refusal to define swaraj intimated his intention to maintain control over a movement that had the potential to become far more radical than Gandhi had intended.

The prevention of further changes to the Congress creed was nonetheless a much easier feat to accomplish than the actual maintenance of the nationalist elite's control of the mobilised masses. At Chauri Chaura in February 1922, the form of protest that was adopted by the local peasants 'exceeded the limits set by the nationalist leadership'.[133] As Gandhi feared losing control, he suspended the mass civil disobedience by means of a resolution that was passed by the Congress working committee that sought immediate

[127] *Ibid*, p. 54.

[128] See L. L. Rai, 'The national outlook: the great need of the situation', in *Lala Lajpat Rai: The Man in His Word*, (ed.) L. L. Rai (Madras, 1907), p. 206.

[129] *Report of the Thirty-Fifth Indian National Congress*, p. 52.

[130] *Report of the Thirty-Sixth Indian National Congress*, p. 52.

[131] Gandhi, *Swaraj in One Year*, p. 4.

[132] *Report of the Thirty-Sixth Indian National Congress*, p. 57.

[133] Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, p. 150.

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demobilisation of the masses. This abrupt decision to decelerate the Non-Cooperation Movement blindsided a number of other prominent nationalists who did not agree with Gandhi's response to the occurrences at Chauri Chaura. In its immediate aftermath, Gandhi was indicted for the crime of sedition and thrown into jail.

At the 1922 Gaya session of the Congress—held when Gandhi was in jail—efforts were made yet again to amend the official creed. A resolution that was introduced by Basanta Kumar Majumdar proposed that the 'attainment of Swaraj'—that is, 'the attainment of complete independence'—should be the object of the Indian National Congress.[134] Thanks to Gandhi's enduring ideological influence on the Congress elite, the resolution did not receive the assent of the majority. Despite—or perhaps because of—the fact that the untranslated signifier swaraj came to be enshrined in the Congress Constitution, the meaning of swaraj remained in a state of flux. At the Gaya session, in his presidential address, Chittaranjan Das argued against associating the signifier swaraj with a specific governmental form; instead, he imputed a more grandiose meaning to the signifier:

> A question has often been asked as to what is Swaraj. Swaraj is indefinable and is not to be confused with any particular system of Government. […] Swaraj is the natural expression of the national mind. The full outward expression of that mind covers, and must necessarily cover, the whole life history of a nation. […] The question of nationalism, therefore, looked at from another point of view, is the same question as that of Swaraj.[135]

In the era of Ripon's reforms, swarajya had been used as a translation for self-government; decades later—at the end of the Non-Cooperation Movement—swaraj had become a synecdochic marker of Indian nationalism. The signifier that was for a long time used to name the goal of the nationalist movement thus was made, willy-nilly, coterminous with 'the whole life history of a nation'!

Conclusion

In the recent past, the lens of the untranslatable has been used by scholars to examine European philosophical traditions.[136] In contrast, the use of untranslatables in the political history of South Asia—though prominent—still remains to be researched and recounted at length. Swaraj was, perhaps, the most widely disseminated of the untranslatables that Indian nationalism engendered. Historical interrogations of swaraj have hitherto mostly focused attention on the Gandhian uses of that term in the treatise *Hind Swaraj* and beyond. This essay, however, has attempted to demonstrate that the journey of swaraj—from its modern inception as an equivalent of self-government to its later entry into the English political lexicon as an untranslated term—was punctuated by many discursive mediations. On the one hand, some such mediations undermined the equivalence that was intended by figures such as Telang and Naoroji between swaraj and self-government. On the other, they allowed the nationalists of various shades to endow swaraj with the meanings that they preferred.

We should, nevertheless, avoid the assumption that—in the wake of Gandhian interventions—the use of swarajya as the translational counterpart of self-government reached complete obsolescence. As late as 1942, both terms were used to portray the

[134] *Report of the Thirty-Seventh Indian National Congress* (Patna, 1923), p. 121.

[135] *Ibid*, p. 27.

[136] A. Lianeri, 'A regime of untranslatables: temporalities of translation and conceptual history', *History and Theory* 53.4 (2014), p. 475.

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political future that the colonial authorities had intended for India. That year, at a press conference that was held during the visit of the Cripps' Mission to India, Sir Stafford Cripps promised that Indians would be given 'full self-government'. But he was asked:

> Q: Why don't you use the word 'Swaraj'?
>
> A: I know the use of the word pretty well. I don't know the language, but I have heard it many times over the last few years. I should say there is no difference between the two expressions. Ours is longer, yours is shorter, but they are the same.[137]

Cripps's assumption—that the two signifiers were synonymous—would have appeared incontrovertible in 1906. However—over time—swaraj became a fairly labile signifier that was amenable to multiple adaptations and renewals. In closing, let us note one such moment of renewal from the early history of post-colonial India. About two months after the official end to the British rule in India—at a mass meeting in Allahabad—the then-Congress president J. B. Kripalani reminded his audience that they had yet to attain swaraj:

> What you have achieved today is that Britishers and their rule have gone from the country. […] The shackles of your bondage are broken, but you have not started moving towards the attainment of your ideal. It should be, therefore, the duty of each and everyone of you to search within yourself what you have to do to reach to that ideal.[138]

By pronouncing these statements, Kripalani sought to keep alive the elusive quest for swaraj amidst the gloom of the partition and its tragedies. Thus, the tradition of repurposing swaraj—that had facilitated the emergence of swaraj as an untranslatable expression in colonial India—also ensured its survival as a utopian goal after the passing of the empire.

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[137] See Proceedings of a Press Conference held by Sir S. Cripps on 31 March 1942 (Extract), in *Constitutional Relations between Britain and India: The Transfer of Power 1942–1947*, (eds.) N. Mansergh and E. W. R. Lumby (London, 1970), vol. I, p. 577.

[138] 'Swaraj is yet to come: Congress president's plea', *The Times of India*, 15 October 1947, p. 5.

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